

DANDA NATA

OF

ORISSA

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ORISSA SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI

MUSEUM BUILDING, BHUBANESWAR

Forward

I am extremely delighted at the Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi's sincere efforts to publish monographs on the histrionic art forms of Orissa, the first one being on Chhau Dance of Dhenkanal, and the second one in the series being the 'Danda Nata' of Orissa

'Danda Nata' of Orissa has a glorious past and is even today very popular among the masses. It is performed for thirteen days every year with all its ritualistic significance strictly respected by its performers.

Unfortunately we the westernised urbanites of Orissa have little or no knowledge about what 'Danda Nata' actually is. They hardly know that their two most favourite dances 'Chadheiya Chadheiyani' and 'Kela Keluni' quite often enjoyed and appreciated for their inherent humour and human appeal on the urban theatre floors are but two sequences taken out of the context of 'Danda Nata' which comprises as is obvious from the monograph, of three distinct phases and a series of sequences with characters from mythology as well as from the rustic society of the past.

Our ignorance is, however, no bliss as it alienates us from our proud cultural heritage which, paradoxically enough our western friends so much eulogise during their visits to this land.

I have little doubt therefore, that this modest monograph will enliven the spirit of the art- lovers of Orissa and inspire them to conduct further research on this histrionic art form so that we can provide enough food on this histrionic art for scholars interested to discover our cultur like a Max Muller discovering ancient India or a W B. Yeats discovering the greatness in the works of Tagore.

Pranabandhu Kar
President
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One of the little known facts about the cultural facundity of Orissa is the prevalence of a large variety of "Folk theatres". The Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi, therefore, has taken upon itself a programme of publishing a series of monographs on the different forms of Folk theatre. "Danda Nata is its second venture and the current year's programme includes publication of monographs on five other forms like Bharat Lila (Dwari Nacha), Chaiti Ghoda, Prahallad Natak, Desia Nata and Bandi Nata.

2. Danda Nata presents the fascinating feature of a curious amalgam of tantric Buddhism, tantric Saivism and Saktism, and thus bears the stamp of a cultural synthesis achieved in centuries past. It has a common strain with that of Chaiti Ghoda Nata, Patua Jatra and Chadak Puja. It is performed in the shrines of Goddesses in some coastal areas and specially in Garhjats, the ex-State areas namely Bhatarika of Baramba, Sarala of Jhankada and Charchika of Banki in Cuttack District, Chandrasekhar (Lord Siva) of Dhenkanal, Hingula of Talcher, Kalapata of Angul, and Rankei Bauti of Hindol in Dhenkanal District, Ramchandi of Konarka and Gouri of Nayagarh in Puri District, Samalei of Sambalpur, Danda Devi of Keonjhar and in many other shrines. It is also performed before Lord Gopinath of Narasinghpur in Cuttack District which is another intersting aspect of the process of cultural synthesis.

3. During the first three centuries after Christ, Buddhism continued to dominate the cultural life of Kalinga under the aegis of savants like Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Maitreyanath etc, Till about the middle of the fourth century A. D. the Satabahanas. the Murundas, the Nagas of Bindhyatabi and the Guptas politically either dominated or influenced Kalings, Trikalings (Giri Kalings), Amita Tosali, Kosala, Mahakantara and Kurala regions at various times During this period, Brahmanic religion began to permeate the different strata of society. In Giri Kalinga and Bindhyabati. worship of Siva became popular. Saivism

flourished under the Mudgalas of Utkal (6th century A. D.), Gangas, Sailodbhavas (6th-7th century A. D.). the Nalas (5th-6th century A D,). the Bhaumakaras (9th century), and the Somavansis (8th-12th century). The Kapila Samhita. Ekamra Purana. Ekamra Chandrika and Swarnadrimahodaya describe the everlasting achievements of Sasanka for his construction of the temple of Tribhubaneswar Siva at Ekamra Kshetra. The worship of Stambheswari was prevalent from fifth century in Dakhin Kosala, Trikalinga, and Kantara (Wesern Orissa), under the Sulkis (5th-6th century A.D.) the Nalas. the Parvata Dwarakas (5th century), the Tungas and the Bhanjas (9th century) Viraja of Jajpur. The Vaitarani and Viraja Tirth of Mahabharat, Navigaya of Vishnu Purana and the Sidha Pitha of Kubija Tantra had flourished as a centre of Saktism from 4th-5th century to about 8th century and by the time Vaital temple (about 600 A D) was built, Bhubaneswar witnessed a unique blending of Saktism, Saivism and Mahayan Buddhism.

4. Orissa was the cradle of Tantric Buddhism. In eighth century A D, Indrabhuti, the king of Uddiyana organised Mantrayana Buddhism into Vajrayana and his sister Laxsminkara was connected with development of Sahajayana. A large number of Tantric Buddhist scholars such as Saraha (8th century). Kambala, Padmavajra. Luipa (10th century),Lalita Vajra,Kukkuri. Pita etc. were associated with Uddiyana. The grandiose cenception of "Sahaja', as the ultimate reality of the philosophical speculations of Upanisads. Buddha, Aswaghosha. Nagarjuna, of Vijnanavadins, Varayanists etc., and the human body as the abode of all tattvas. pithas and deities resulting in propitiation of human nature ultimately degenerated into a conglomeration of sexophysical practices and remained confined to Gubya Puja. Tantric Saivism, was the refuge to escape extinction. Thus, Nathism evolved round about 12th century as a reactionary movement against the erotic practices of Tantric Buddhism. Yoginikula tantra of Matsyendranath was the precursor of Natha cult and gave rise to the Yoginipithas of Ranipur Jharial (9th century) and Hirapar (10th century), two out of 4 such pithas in India. Nathism, later transformed itself into Tantric Saivism by Gorakhanath. Its. Yogic cult (Niradhara Yoga of Hatha Yoga) influenced the yogic philosophers like Achyuta, Ananta, Yasobanta etc and also transformed the religion and philosophy of Lord Jagannath into a Buddhist-Vaisnava cult in 15th and 16th centuries.

5. The vast amorphos mass of population have, all along their perigrinations through history, accoutred their feelings and propensities, their emotions and bhavas, in a manner, entirely different, both qualitatively and quantitatively, from the dominant minority. The different art forms like the folk theatres, thus, represent a kind of telescoping the social history of the peoples involved. They are characterised by an intense desire to live and let live, and a collective consciousness which is both wider and narrower than the individual units composing it; wider in its fullness, potentiality, propensity and anonimity, and narrower in its depth and perspective. And since they arise as a social prdouct, a cultural synthesis, they reflect the highest common factor of the forces and foctors that compose it.

6. We have no doubt that this monograph will prove to be of interest to layman and the elite alike.

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Secretary,
Orissa Sangeet Natak Akademi.



"CHADHEIYA"



"BINAKARA"



LORD SHIVA APPEARS TO BLESS



SAPUA KELA

DANDA NATA OF ORISSA

Danda Nata of Orissa, also known as the Danda Jatra, happens to be one amongst the most ancient form of histrionic arts of the state.

Associated with ritualistic services, Danda Nata forms an institution of dance, music and dramatics blended with religions, social reformation and an association of Universal Brotherhood.

Mainly an worship of Lord Shiva, the God of destruction of the Hindu mythology, who is also the Lord of histrionic arts (Nata Raj), this theatrical form brings into its fold a harmonious feeling of co-existance between followers of different philosophical doctrins, between political principles and sets of opinions.

Along with votive dedications to Lord Shiva (Rudra, Hara, Mahadeva, Shankar, Bholanath etc) in a Danda Nata, the greatness of other Gods and Goddesses such as Vishnu, Krishna Ganesh, Durga, Kali etc, are also equally invoked.

Similarly while the original participants in a Danda Nata were said to be only the low-caste Hindus people belonging to all other higher castes such as Kshyatriyas and Brahmins also participate in this institution with equal interest.

Unsophisticated as it may look from the so-called modern urban standard, this Danda Nata of Orissa has even to day as before, the maximum popularity amongst the masses than any other performing arts in the whole of the State.

The word DANDA NATA or DANDA JATRA :

The word Jatra, is an indigenous term for the English word "theatre" and "Nata" is a derivative term of the word Natya which conveys a meanings of dance, music and dramatics.

The word Danda, denotes several meaning according to the lexicon. Mainly it means (1) Staff, Club, Stick, Rod, Pole, or Sceptre etc (2) Punishment, Chastisement.

In this Danda Nata (1) A sceptre of the Lord, is worshipped and (2) The participants voluntarily bear self-inflicted penance.

According to very ancient Hindu philosophy, the greatness of an individual of this materialistic world depends upon his accomplishment of self control over his own Body (Kaya), Mind (Mana) & Speech (Vakya). It takes tremendous amount of practice to gain this control and amounts to a lot of self denials Those who achieve this are known as the Tri-Dandis (triple chastisement)

Since this method of bringing purity of conduct involves a lot of punishments (Danda) to self, this performance according to many is known as the Danda Nata.

The word DANDA :

There is however, a very interesting definition given to the origin of the word DANDA. Because of the vigorous types of dances associated with the Danda Nata, it is said to have originated from the heavenly Tandava Nrutya of Lord Shiva. It is said that once Lord Shiva was teaching a Tandava Nrutya to his son Lord Ganesh. While dancing vigorously he kicked the stage and the sound "DAN" emanated. Simultaneously one of his Ghagudi (the brass tinkler) was broken from its chain around his raised ankle, dropped and fell on the body of the Mardala (the percussion instrument) emanating another subsequent

note of sound as "DA". Together, therefore the word DANDA evolved to get the blessings of Lord Shiva to associate its meaning with performance of dance and music with vigour known as "Udanda".

The time of Danda Nata

Danda Nata commences from the Chaitra Purnima and continues upto the Pana Sankranti (Vishuva Sankranti) day. These two months, Chaitra and Baisakha are considered most auspicious for the worship of Lord Shiva. Many religious treatise indicate that if Lord Shiva is invoked during this period of the year, the earth is blessed with good harvest, increase of wealth and all round improvement of the families and communities occur.

The invocatory performances of Lord Shiva commences from the sixth day of the Meena Month (March-April). For four days from the sixth day, preliminary preparations are made (people make vows, some receive Hukums (Nostrums), through trance. Then for eight days the Jhamu Jatra takes place. The rest thirteen days of the month is meant for Danda Jatra.

RITUALS

In Orissa like the Danda Jatra, there are other kinds of ritualistic festivals as well, which are associated with self inflicted penance. They are the (1) Patua Jatra (2) Chadaka Puja (3) Jhamu Jatra etc. While in Chadaka Puja and Jhamu Jatra mainly the penances are demonstrated, in Patua Jatra, and Danda Jatra, regular theatrical perfomances are followed in the nights

The participants in a Danda Nata invoke the blessings of Lord Shiva. They are all under a vow. It may be to be blessed with a child, to fulfil certain ambition, to get rid of sickness, seeking happiness in life, good harvest, even peace and happiness to all fellowmen. The total number of vowers are 13 and the

number of days for the festival is also 13. The vowers are known as the Bhoktas. This word Bhokta is derived from the word Bhakta (Devotee). Drawn from all communities, the leader of the Bhoktas is known as the Pata-Bhakta. All the Bhoktas lead a very pious life for 21 days. They donot eat meat or fish nor cohabit during this period. The Pata Bhokta does not eat rice and lives on fruit-juice and snacks. Others eat just one meal a day consisting of plain rice etc which they cook themselves and eat at a place away from habitation. During the time of their gruel, any human voice per chance brings an abrupt end to their eating for that day. That is why at some places they keep on beating the drums until the eating is over.

During the period of Jatra, all Bhoktas carry out different forms of services to the Lord and there fore they are named differently. They are as under :-

(1) Pata Bhokta (2) Deula Padia (3) Danda Swami (4) Nili Patra (5) Chandania Patra (6) Gobaria Patra (7) Danta Kathia Patra (8) Betua Patra (9) Dhupia Patra (10) Bhandaria (11) Chua Mali etc. (Collected from Dr. K. B. Dash, article)

KAMANA GHATA

Ghata is the Pitcher

In most of the religious and social functions of the Hindus, a pitcher full of water holds a very important place. The pitcher represents the body and the water is the life. It represents the God invoked and hence worshipped with due reverence. After the function is over the pitcher is again taken into the water of a pond or river with due care and immersed from where it hadbeen brought.

In a Danda Nata this Ghata is known as the Kamana Ghata. Kamana means desire and to worship the Kamana Ghata means to seek the blessings of the Lord for the fulfilment of one's desire.

There is again an interesting stoıy as to how the pitcher came to be known as Kamina. "Kamina" happened to be the name of a Raksyasi (Demoness) with whom Lord Shiva fell in Love while moving in a jungle. For sometime Lord Shiva forgot his duties to the mankind. Afterwards when he realised, he wanted to leave her. At the parting Kamina asked him about her fate and the Lord consoled her saying that at least once in a year the people of the earth will be remembering her. This Ghata named as Kamana therefore is said to be a symbol of hers. (from Dr. K. B. Dashs, article).

According to poet late Bhikari Charan, this Ghata represents "Kalika", the consort of Lord Shiva. It is through her blessings, the Bhoktas are able to take up the, self inflicted penances without any ill effect. It is she who protects all and fulfills all ambitions.

A new pitcher is taken to the pond or a river and water is lifted, to the accompaniment of drums and blowing of conch shell. This pitcher is first worshipped under a banian tree and then taken out in a procession through the village and then kept in a hut (made preferably in front of a Shiva's temple), known as the Kamana Ghara. Two pieces of cane-sticks, representing Hara' & 'Gouri' are also kept near the Ghata and worshipped. A sacred fire is kept lighted up in the hut from which Pata-Bhokta lights up an oil lamp. While lighting, the Bhoktas yell with the word "Rushi Putre". Time to time when resin and myrrh powder is thrown on the lighted oil lamp, it burns up with a flare and the Bhoktas yell the words "Kala Rudramani Ho Joy".

A staff of the length of 6 1/2 cubits bearing 13 joints (representing 13 Bhoktas) and a piece of cloth tied to its top is worshipped. This is the Kamana Danda.

WHERE TO PERFORM :

The entire party consisting of the Bhoktas and their colleagues go around the village in a procession with the band of musicians. No specific declaration is made as to where they are going to perform "Danda" on that day.

Like the Bhoktas, some villagers (male or female) also keep a vow in their mind for getting some mercy from Lord Shiva. Seeing the procession, these vowers pour water and clean up the frontage of their house with cow-dung water and hurriedly put up. floor designs with coloured powders and keep a jugful of of water.

This indicates an invitation to the party.

Having received an invitation thus, the group stop there. After small preliminaries. the group light up an oil lamp and keep it on the verandah of the host and return to their camp.

At mid day, the party comes back to the spot and perform the Bhumi (Earth) Danda or Dhuli (Dust) Danda.

The Phases of Dand Nata :

Danda Nata, distinctly comprises of three phases.

(1) The Bhumi or Dhuli Danda (Acrobatics & gymnastics) at day time.

(2) The Pani Danda (Aquatic feats) at day time

(3) The Danda Suanga (Dance, Music-& Dramatics) at night time.

These three are the main, however, while taking out the procession or the begining of the night performance the "Agni Danda" (or the performance with fire) is also displayed.

The Bhumi or Dhuli Danda :

This consists of a lot of physical excercises and acrobatics. The themes enacted in short sequences represent mainly the art of ploughing, cultivation and harvesting. A few formations in human figures,

pyramids are displayed. During these performances one Bhokta asks "How much paddy" ? And the other Bhoktas give a figure which denotes, the ensuing result of harvest during the coming year. This performance of Bhumi Danda is over by the afternoon and the Bhoktas yell" Kala Rudra Mani Ho Joy" and proceed to the village pond for the "Pani Danda".

Pani Danda :

Pani Danda consists of aquatic feats. While the groups put up their performance as they swim and form pyramids in water, the musicians play Dhol & Mohuri. Men, women and children gather around the pond or the riverside to watch this show.

After this performance cf Pani Danda, the Bhoktas return to their camp to have their only meal of the day and to prepare for the nights performance.

DANDA NATA SUANGA

The word "Suanga" corresponds to the Sanskrit word "Swanga" which means graceful acting. Dance is always based on music. Any dramatic performance consisting of Dance and music therefore is known as Suanga in Oriya language In a Danda Nata like any olden Suanga, every character enters dancing with the accompanying music, gives his self introduction, description of what the character is wearing or supposed to wear, even a description of his gait and make-up and while singing he dances intermittently. During a dialogue also the dance actions are corroborated. In between the dialogues both the speaker and the listening charactor dance vigorously. This pattern is a regular feature in every sequence of the Danda Nata which distinguishes its identity from other types of performing arts.

The PRESENTATION

The presentation style of Danda Nata is absolutely simple as that of any common Jatra of Orissa except the fact that they do not need a raised platform in the centre. Any open space or the village cross-road turns out to be an acting area, sorrounded by spectators on all the four sides. Only a narrow path amongst the spectators wends its way to a distant improvised green room where the participants do the make up, costuming and rest. Sometimes a canopy is also put-up over the central acting area.

The Accompanying Music :

The main accompanying musical instruments in a Danda Nata is the DHOLA (the double-sided drum) and the MAHURI (the wind instrument like Shehnai). The other instruments which are used only in sequences of God characters are the GHANTA (the bell metal disc), SANKHA (the conch-shell) KAHALI (Clarion), The JHANJA (Brass alloy clappers).

Beside the above, other smaller instruments like GHOONGROO, GHAGUDI (small & big tinklers) DASAKATHI, RAM TALI (wooden clappers). KHANJANI, Ghooduki or Dhuduki. Dambaroo and Bina etc. are also played by the characters themselves as required.

The "Bina" used by the charactor "Binakara" in Dandanata is not the type of "Bina" (the string instrument) known popularly. Here it is not a string instrument played by twangs. It is a Bow decorated with peacock feathers and in its string seven tinkle bells are tied. The player Binakara holds the Bow in his left hand raised and by jerks brings out the jingle in rythm,

The Place of the Musicians :

The musicians take their positions at a side of the open arena nearer to the artists passage. Sometimes they move to the Vesha Ghara (Green Room) to lead a character to the arena.

The drummers not only play the drums through out the performance but also demonstrate their own skill and stamina by playing the drums with regular dances and acrobatics in between the sequences.

The THEME OF DANDA NATA :

Danda Nata is not a performance of a complete story drama. It has a chain of loosely connected conventional episodes with a central theme of complete faith in God. It is He who can rescue the earthly-beings from the clutches of evil. It is He who can grant happiness in life. Nothing happens without the will of Providence and so we must surrender to Him always.

The CHARACTERS & ROLES IN A DANDA NATA

Since Danda Nata does not contain a full story in its totality, each sequences has its own characters. So there is a series of sequences in which the characters appear in different Veshas and Upaveshas.

While slight variations are seen amongst the Veshas and Upa-veshas of Danda Natas of the North, South and West Orissa, the main Veshas like the PRAVA, KALIKA, SHIVA, CHADHEIYA, CHADHEIYANI, PATRA SAURA, SAURUNI, PARVATI, KELA, KELUNI, SABARA, SABARUNI, BAI DHANA, BINAKAR, KARUANI etc are mostly common every where.

The other characters which are introduced at some places but not included at other places are NANDI, NARADA, GUNIA, BAIDYA, JAMBABA, DWARI, additional wives of Chadheiya or Kela, son of Chadheiya, BANA DURGA, a brother of Chadheiya, son of Saura, BAISHNABAS, GUDIA, GOPALUNIS, KRISHNA, GOPIS, BRAHMIN, OLD MAN, NARADA, DANDASI, DUMBURA, & HIS MOTHER, JAMADAR, HADI HADIANI, SAHEB, DAROGA etc.

From amongst the characters of Danda Nata, it will be seen that except the characters of Gods or Goddesses, all others are the most ancient human species, nothing to do with the so called modern civilisation. They are from the lowest cadre of the society and the most down troddon They have no materialistic belonging but yet have their biggest belonging "the deep faith in God".

The PATA BHOKTA :-

The Pata Bhokta is not a regular character in the Danda Nata, but he in plain clothes is there through-out, not only as the chief of the Bhoktas but a sort of Mediator between the characters and the spectators. He may be termed as the Sutradhara or the Master of ceremony in a Danda Jatra.

On behalf of Spectators, he asks questions and talks to the characters. Sometimes he also recites a story to the masses. He also leads the first "Vandana" the invocatory songs in praise of all Gods and Goddesses.

PRABHA

The character "Prabha" which as a must, is introduced in the beginning of a Danda Nata, represents the Halo or the symbolic luminous ring of light around saviour, Lord Shiva's head.

A semi-circular cut-out in the shape of nimbus, made of bamboo, decorated and tied to the back of the actor from waist.

The character is brought-out only during the ritualistic period of 13 days of Danda Nata. During other period of the year if a performance is made for entertainment, PRABHA is not brought out.

At some places of Orissa, Danda Nata without PRABHA is known as UDANDA NATA.

Prabha, ordinarily enters solo, but there seems to have been variations. Sometimes PARBATI or DURGA or KALIKA also enter with PRABHA, with their usual make-ups and costumes accompanying with the fan-fare of a Gods entry. sometimes with the fire play.

These characters enter with vigorous dancing-sometime fall into a trance and taken back to the green room.

Sometimes this (or these) character gives self-introductery songs. The Pata Bhokta asks for blessings, so that the Danda Nata performance is peacefully done. The God blesses and tells them to go on with sanctity.

CHADHEIYA :

This Chadheiya is the most important character in a Danda Nata. He represents a traditional bird-catcher who lives in the natures bountiful. He catches or kills birds, sells them and makes a living. He holds a pole (Danda) in one hand and a noose in the other. There has been references that Chadheiyas wear Masks but they normally do not use masks.

Scantily clad. with a handkerchief and head gear, he enters the arena with the usual self introductions and the descriptions of his gait and attire, accompanying with vigorous dancing.

With the Pata Bhokta asking him several questions as to who is he, where he had gone, the places he has visited and the purpose of his coming, the Chadheiya answers them all through his songs.

The Chadheiya, in search of birds goes and kills a peacock on a tree in the premises of a temple. This is a great offence because killing of peacock is prohibited. A snake bites him. He falls and dies.

His consort, the Chadheiyani enters in the same manner of self introductions answering to the questions, looking for her husband and atlast finds him dead.

She prays to the Goddess of the Jungle, the VANADURGA, who appears, sympathises and tells her that five types of birds such as Parrot, Mynah. Piegon, Duck & Peacock are the favourites of the Lord. The Chadheiya has been punished by snake bite beacuse he killed a peacock, that again in the temple premises. Deep faith in God will bring him back to life. Vana Durga exits.

After her departure, attempts are made to cure the Chadheiya-through a Gunia (Witch doctor), a Vaidya (Village doctor) but all fail. Later a Kela (Snake Charmer) who by applying spell in the name of God Mohadev & Goddess Parvati brings the Chadheiya back to life.

This in short is the sequence of the Chadheiya in a Danda Nata but there has been severals light variations and adoptations at different places of Orissa. At places they bring in two Chadheiyanis instead of one and in doing so, present the comedy of error and the misfortunes of bigamy through a lot of humorous

situation. At places a Chadheiyani comes first alone, joins her husband, quarrels with him, patches up and asks him to catch a bird for him. In some places a son of Chadheiya, who is a spoilt child is introduced and at the expense of all housemembers opens up the secrets of the house-hold in the public to the amusement of all.

At places, a brother of Chadheiya who is lame and ugly (sometimes) is introduced who, knowing that his brother is dead, offers his candidature to marry his brothers wife.

In some communities, the system of marrying the elder brothers wife prevails after the death of the brother there by justifying eradication of the system of child widow ship and socially maintaining the same cordialities between the families of both boy and the girl.

In the modern times, at some places of Orissa, characters like a Jamadar (a Policeman) or a Paika or a Chowkidar (village watch man) and even a Saheb (An Official) is introduced who conducts an enquiry on the death of the Chadheiya, suspecting it to be a murder etc., inorder to expand the episode and give it a touch of reality.

PATRA SAURA :

This character from its very name indicates a primitive character from amongst the human species.

Although the word 'Saura" is said to be an abbroviation of the word "Sabara" meaning a hunter, there is a tribal community in Orissa which is also known as "Saura", and in a Danda Nata, we have another sequence dedicated for the "Sabara" also.

The ancestry of this character Saura has been described by a popular writer of Danda Nata Jog Malika in his book. He has collected it from Anarya Samhita. It says. "A son was born to saint Kudalaka and his wife. Alakshmi. The child become wayward. He did not put on clothes and loafed around the forest with a hand shovel attiring himself with leaves He lived on fruits and roots. He was a nomad.

He had faith in Vana Debi. the Goddess of the forest, whom he worshipped. He moved from place to place like a mad man searching for food. His most important festival falls on the full moon-day of Shravana, known as Gamha Purnima.

"Lord Ganesha had presented him with a musical instrument "Ghoomra" which he plays, (At nome places it is the Ghuduki and not Ghoomra and at places it is both Ghuduki and Ghoomra which the Patra Saura plays) in Dhaibata: Gandhara & Nishad, to entertain the public."

"Chitra Sena presented him with a twig of the black berry tree. (Jamu Dali) which he ties over his head to have his with fulfilled."

"He holds a cat which accordingly meant to bring good effect when seen before starting for any work,"

There is a belief prevailing at many places that seeing a Cat crossing your path brings bad news or happening. According to Danda Nata, it is not correct. It is a good women to see a cat. Although now a days a cat is not held while dancing, it was a custom to hold a cat.

SAURUNI :

She is the wife of Saura.

She is an illegitimate child of this earthly world.

There is also a story about the origin of Saurani.

Once upon a time, there was a low cast man named "Sankhua". He was once wandering in the forest. There he met the daughter of Sabara and her name was Kshyati. She was very pretty. This youngman made love to her and she conceived. Afterwords she delivered a baby girl. Since she was illegitimate the mother left her in the forest. Fortunately another Sabara named "Madhava" found her and took her to his hut. The girl grew up to a beautiful woman and the Sabara named her as Shova. No body would agree to marry her because her parentage was not known. She was spending a cursed time.

A Patra Saura named Dhana reached the village and seeing her, liked her. They were married and in course of time a daughter was born and she became the Patra Sauruni.

The basket which this character holds and the bangles she wears are said to be presentations by a Sabaruni to her in the forest.

Both Patra Saura and Sauruni sing songs describing the greatness of God. They also relate mythological and religious stories. They quarrel amongst themselves and bring a mediator and have an amicable settlement.

To this sequence at places, other characters like the son of the Saura, a Vaidya, Father-in-law etc. are added to expand the theme.

SAPUA KELA :

He is the snake charmer. His role is to save the Chadheiya's life, lost in a snakes bite, He brings with him a variety of snakes (sometimes real snakes are displayed). He knows all about the snake world. He is a great devotee of Lord Shiva and with his blessings he has acquired the power to cure a patient from snake bite and give him back the lost life. Beside this power he has also acquired other powers like Stambhna (Benumbing), Mohan (Causing delusion), Basya (Subdue), Uchchatana (up rooting), Marana (Killing), Tarana (Saving), Akarshan (attracting), Udana (flying) and such other black magics. He plays a Nageswar (Wind instrument made out of guard dried) and brings out Sapta-Swara (seven sounds). He also plays a Dambaru (the favorite musical instrument of Lord Shiva). He displays snakes, makes them dance. He also dances himself.

This character as he enters like others, sings self introductory songs, invocatory songs, songs relating to snakes, Padmatola Geet (song relating to Lord Krishnas plucking of Lotus in river Kalandi), songs relating to places, mountains, rivers, states, as well as the snake bite cure Mantras.

To this sequence of Sapua Kela, sometimes, the caracter, of his consert, the Keluni, a son is also introduced, providing interludes of comedy, Keluni also adminsters tattoos, singing songs relating to it.

JOGI :

He is mendicant. This character mainly mentains himself from the alms he gets. Through out the day he moves from door to door seeking alms. He has no properties of his own except the begging bowl.

In a Danda Nata, when they introduce the "Jogi" as an independent sequence, his consort the Jogiani. is also introduced.

The Jogi, after the days hard work of wandering from place to place, comes home and searches for his wife. After finding her he asks her to serve him food To this she replies that he may go himself to cook and eat. The quarrel starts. A mediator (sometimes known as Manginath) intrudes, at first encourages them to fight and then throws them to sides and they run away.

In same places a group of Jogis enter the arena together, expose their identities and speak cut as to how they have found their profession of begging, easy, It is not the detachment to worldly affairs and faith in God but their lethargy to work for food which has made them to put on the garb of fake Jogis. The sequence turns to be a satire.

There is an interesting story which relates the origin of Jogis.

Once upon a time Lord Shiva and Parvati were having a chat. Parvati told him that the name of Lord Brahma is attributed to all creation including the human species. Shiva's name is attributed to destructions only. So, inorder to prove for all times that Lord Shiva is also a creator, He should create a new species amongst the human being. Hearing this Lord Shiva smiled and at once brought out a real human being from his Yoga, He named him Hara Natha. Parvati said that without procreation this specie will have no purpose. So obtaining Shiva's permission, she brought out a female human being from her mind and named her Sushila Both Hara Natha and Sushila were married and from them the community

evovled. These Jogis hold a dry shell of govrd as their begging bowl for collecting alms. They chant the five letters "BOM BHOLANATH" meaning Shiva which protects them from all evils (fiom 'Jogi Malika's Danda Nata).

SABARA :

Sabara is a hunter. He is a man who lives by killing of animals in the forest. He is a devotee of Lord Shiva and recites his greatness always. He holds a bow and arrows and an axe. He wears a turban tucked with bird's feathers and dances vigorously.

Sabaruni is the consort of the Sabara. She decorates herself with many varieties of Jungle flowers. She sells berries of various kinds through her Koli-Bika-Geeta (songs on berries)

Like the Chadheiyani, at some places she also sells birds of various kinds. by singing songs on varieties of birds (Chadhei Geet).

This couple also quarrel amongst themselves and have an amicable settlment, patching up their differences.

"Sabara" as a community, has a lot of emotional attachment with the upper class Hindus of this state. Mythology relates as to how Lord Jagannath was being worshipped in the Jungle by the King of Sabara, Viswabasu and how a Brahmin Vidyapati marriad the daughter of the Sabara and ever since, Lord Jagannatha is being worshipped by the children of this couple, through generations. A lot of Sabara culture therefore has been adopted by the upper class Hindus of Orissa.

The Character of Sabara therefore in a very popular one in Orissa.

BAIDHANA :

Here is a character whose identity and purpose is shrouded in mystery. He is known as the BHAIDHANA in western Orissa. which means "Brother Dear".

Late Laxminarayan Sahoo traces the origin of this character to that of a Gandharaba (a celestial musician) who having been cursed in heaven has taken life on earth. He is singing and dancing in praise of the Lord in order to get back to his previous life in heaven. Baidhana holds two bundles of peacock feathers and moves them beautifully as he dances.

BINAKARA :

The man who plays the Bina is the Binakara. How this Bina differs from other Binas has been mentioned earlier (in the chapter on accompanying Music).

This Binakara, while holding the Bow shaped Bina by his left hand at shoulder level also holds an arrow (peacock feathers tied) in his right hand.

The artist dresses up with a redshirt on his body and a turban on his head and puts on bead necklaces.

Binakara is the most important and final character in a Danda Nata. He recites Sanskrit verses and explains it's meaning. He narrates in song a complete story from mythology, glorifying the greatness of God and the virtues over vices. He answers various types of questions (all in songs) put to him by the Pata Bhokta (on behalf of the spectators). He also explains meanings of his recitations in prose if need be. To avoid monotony he gives similies, adages and changes the tunes of his songs. Intermittently he dances while jingling the 'Bina' accompanied by his consort, the Karuani.

KARUANI :

The consort of Binakara in Danda Nata, the Karuani is also the co-singer and the co-dancer

Sometimes to amuse the spectators they have battle of wits, wordy quarrels to follow a mutual settlement.

The Binakara sequence is of the longest duration in a Danda Nata.

After completing the story, the Binakar sings the finale known as "Melaani" songs expecting honorariums for the performers. Finally the importance of Danda Nata is told as to how by arranging, performing and witnessing the Danda Nata, people will be relieved of the punishments of God.

OTHER CHARACTERS IN DANDANATA :

Beside the above characters, many other minor characters also appear in a Danda Nata and it varies from place to place.

In a sequence on Lord Krishna (which is not necessarily produced by all groups) Radha and her friends Gopikas go for selling curds. A Babaji (Mendicant) begs of curds and blesses them. After selling curds they want to go back by crossing a ferry. Krishna in disguise takes them on a boat across the river Jamuna.

There the Gopis land in the garden of Kansa, the King of Mathura. They are fascinated at the varieties of flowers and start plucking them, The watchman of Kansa comes and drives them away.

In Angul, they introduce this watchman to be a Mian Pathan (a Mohamedan). Written by rural poets, this introduction of a Muslim in a Danda Nata goes to reveal the influence on the societies after the Moghul rule and the peaceful co-existance between communities

"Kandha" is a tribal community of Orissa. They have beautiful forms of "Dhangada Nata." This dance therefore is introduced in a sequence known as Kandha Kandhuni.

Similarly at places Baishnaba Sadhus also have been introduced doing "Kirtan" in praise of the Lord with interludes of side humour.

On the whole beside the important characters, now a days, many new sequences are added in a Danda Nata with new character as a sort of novelty.

The Language :

A Danda Nata mainly consists of songs in Oriya. At places Sanskrit verses are also recited. Prose dialouges are very few and at many instances, they are spoken extempore.

Beautiful ornamentations are made in the composition of the verses. In most of the cases the writers choose to keep the first letters of the subsequent lines in an alphabetical order from "Ka" to 'Kshya". Songs for inferior characters are in local dialects It is seen in many cases that characters like the Lord Shiva, Narada watchman etc., speak in Hindi or Urdu language which can be traced to the impact of Moghul & Maratha rule in Orissa.

In humorous sequences, mixed languages and dialects of Hindi, Telugu, Bengali have also been seen used.

On the whole, in a Danda Nata, the language is fluid, simple and easily understood by all.

ELEMENT OF HUMOUR :

In a Danda Nata of Orissa a high sense of humour prevails almost in every sequence. There are battle of wits, mutual admiration, quarrels and compromise between the different couples in all sequences.

The satires on fake Sadhu who makes a living on the religious sentiments of the people, on the Vaidya who adminsters wrong medicines, on the not so pious holy man letting off wrong blessings, the gags etc, cause roars of laughter amongst the spectators. The peculiar styles of vigorous dancing by Sadhu, the Chowkidar and other characters also provide a lot of amusement.

Full of satire on the practical side of a mere earthlv being in almost every sequence, this Danda Nata reveals a very high sense of humour of the rural mass of Orissa.

Elimination of Superstitions, Untouchability :

To eliminate odd superstitions and untouchability, Danda Nata has been a very powerful medium of mass communication.

The No. 13, has at some quarters been associated to be a bad omen. In a Danda Nata there are 13 Bhoktas. it continues for 13 days, the pole worshipped has 13 joints indicating that 13 is a lucky number.

Also the conventional notion about a cat, considered by many a bad omen, is sqashed directly by making it to be held by the Patra Saura, who bluntly sings

Biradi Mahima, Ki Debi Upama
Anukula Kalabele
Ghate Sarba Subha Na hue Asubha
Tenu biraje ta Kare

ବିରାଡ଼ି ମହିମା, କି ଦେବୀ ଉପମା
ଅନୁକୂଳ କାଳବେଳେ
ଘଟେ ସର୍ବ ଶୁଭ, ନହୁଏ ଅଶୁଭ
ତେଣୁ ବିରାଜେ ତା କରେ ।
(ଯୋଗୀ ମଲ୍ଲିକ)

Hence a cat not inauspicious.

DANDA NATA - AN INSTITUTION OF LEARNING :

Danda Nata thus, not only provides clean entertainment to the masses, it also teaches them the art of living, broad thinking and simple living. It inculcates a deep faith in God, the creator of this universe with a sense of devotion and duty.

Danda Nata is of the masses, by the masses and for the masses.

DHIREN DASH

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